

禪

# CH'AN NEWSLETTER

No. 58 December 1986

CREATIONS OF THE MIND  
(Lecture given Sunday, July 21, 1985  
by Master Sheng-Yen)

There was a Ch'an Master named Hsu Yun who travelled to many different places in Asia, and wherever he found a monastery or temple in ruins would collect donations and rebuild it. Many people were quite amazed at his ability, and came to him saying, "Oh, Master, how is it so easy for you to build one monastery after another? For us it is difficult to build one simple hut". Hsu Yun replied, "Because I have monasteries in my mind". When they asserted that they too had monasteries in their minds, the Master said, "No, you people really don't. I have been building monasteries in my mind for a long time, so these monasteries were already built. When I want to build monasteries now, it happens. However, you haven't truly started to build the monasteries in your mind. Your so-called monasteries are just daydreams."

The Surangama Sutra states that all phenomena are creations of the mind. We can't interpret it, however, as saying that all things are created by the wandering mind. If you just daydream, and do nothing about it, you will not be able to create any dharma, or phenomena. On the other hand, if your mind has certain tendencies to do something, and you act according to it, then that which you accomplish can certainly be said to be a creation of the mind. If you have feelings towards people, such as anger, sadness, happiness, and you establish relationships with them based on these feelings, then this can also be considered a creation of the mind.

It is said that one's mind is like an accomplished, expert painter who can paint all sorts of worlds from one palette. It's true that whatever exists in the mind can be manifested eventually. And whatever previously existed can turn up in the future. The process is something like the following: You have a huge tank of water with a lot of fine grains of sand in it. As the water is constantly being stirred, the sand grains sink to the bottom - and then rise to the top again. Each movement of the mind is like adding a color to a certain sand grain. Sometimes you add a very strong color that is long lasting, and sometimes you add just a tiny touch. The grains that are colored will sink to the bottom, and then appear again at the top as the water is agitated. But those with a lightly applied color will gradually get paler - only the strongly colored grains will retain their hue. Good and evil



karma work in just this way. Thoughts and actions of different intensities may seem to "disappear" for a while, but they all come back at some time. We just don't see their effects until they rise to the surface. So sometimes we have good fortune, and sometimes we have disasters. All of these events are our own doing. We often speak of promoting welfare for others, or for ourselves, but we do not often speak of promoting disaster. Nonetheless, it is a fact that all disasters are created by ourselves for ourselves.

Whatever exists in our mind will most likely manifest in the future. In fact, it would be really difficult for it not to result in some consequence. Of course, it depends on how strong the karmic actions are - just as the example of the pigments applied to the grains of sand; the stronger colors will last longer.

In the city of Goshwan, in Taiwan, there was a certain factory that treated waste water generated by the many households and industries. Eventually this factory began to have problems because it was itself producing large amounts of waste water, and it was unable to treat it all. So although the purpose of this factory was one of good intention - treating the waste generated by other people - it in fact generated further waste. It is the same with our lives; we do not want to create evil karma, but somehow we just end up doing so. We do not want to cause other people harm, but very often the results of our good intentions ultimately bring some harm. Many wars have occurred in human history due to certain political and religious views. The leaders who brought about these wars were not necessarily evil people; many of them sincerely believed that they were doing things for the good of mankind. Yet, as a consequence, many people underwent great suffering.

Someone asked Master Hsu Yun: "Why are you building monastery after monastery? Eventually they will fall into ruin, or be destroyed by others. So by building monasteries you are in fact providing the occasion for other people to destroy monasteries. You are giving them the opportunity to do evil karma. Why bother to do all this then?" Hsu Yun answered: "When sentient beings do not have good enough merit and virtue, yes, the monasteries will go into ruin or be actively destroyed. But on the other hand, when sentient beings do have better karma, better merit and virtue, then they will need the monasteries. Later the monasteries will go again into ruin. I don't concern myself with that. According to the Buddhadharma, all things are actions done by sentient beings in the sentient being's mind. They are comparable to the vision of a flower in the sky, to the reflection of the moon in the water. They are all illusions, but nonetheless, these dharma activities are things I would like to do at every moment."

So the important thing, in fulfilling certain intentions that we have, is to ask ourselves if we have seriously started building these wishes or vows in our minds. If you are already going in the proper direction for the accomplishment of your goal, then the saying that all phenomena are creations of the mind is definitely true. If you really want something, for example if you wish to attain Buddhahood, then you must have sufficiently strong determination.

There is a story about a couple who were in their late forties, and didn't have any children. They really wanted to have a son, so they went around to many different temples, praying to the



deities. All of their supplications were in vain, however, until they finally reached a temple with an old monk, who was willing to give them advice. He said, "Okay, you just go around to different monasteries and temples, and see if there is any monk living there who is growing old and sickly, with no one to take care of him. You should then take him home, care for him, cure his disease - and you will eventually have a son." So the couple did just that. In time, after visiting several more temples, they found one old monk who was seriously ill, and hadn't anyone to take care of him. So they brought him home. They were very nice to him and cured his illness. However, the monk was indeed quite old, and in two years was about to die. The monk said to the couple: "You two have been so kind to me. How can I pay you back?" And the couple said, "You really don't have to pay us back, because we are doing this in order to have a son." So eventually the monk died. Not long after the couple did indeed have a son. He was very intelligent and quite a nice boy, as it turned out. His parents were really proud and pleased to have him. After many years had passed, and the boy was in his teens, an interesting thing happened. The old man who had first given the advice to the couple came around to visit, and recognized their son. "Why, you are actually an old friend of mine!" Then the boy realized who he was and said, "Well, I hadn't much choice. I had to repay this couple."

The story ends here. Perhaps it was really not so smart to repay the couple by being reborn as their son; it is kind of a foolish thing for an old monk to do. Nonetheless, there is an important point in it. When we seriously want something, we should also make an effort to help other people, and eventually our wishes will be realized.

## NEWS ITEMS

There were over 18 people for the last retreat.

Twelve people took part in the beginner's meditation class on Dec. 6th.

Ching Ying came to visit the Center on November 15th. She brought a group of 14 members from the Pu Suen Buddhist Society from Boston. Shih-fu gave them a talk.

Shih-fu will go back to Taiwan on January 4, 1987 and he will return on April 5th.

**Ch'an Meditation Center  
Institute of Chung-Hwa  
Buddhist Culture  
90-31 Corona Avenue  
Elmhurst, N.Y. 11373  
(718) 592-6593**

**NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
FLUSHING, N.Y.  
PERMIT NO. 1120**

**RETURN POSTAGE  
GUARANTEED**